

FEATURE – WHITE HOUSE GARDEN & USDA PROMOTE HIGH TUNNELS -- A USDA pilot program to promote high tunnels on farms was launched at the White House garden one year ago. USDA's Patrick O'Leary has an update from the nation's capital. (2:01)

WHITE HOUSE ASSISTANT CHEF SAM KASS IS FOLLOWING HIS FALL HARVEST WITH A WINTER CROP. KASS, ALSO A POLICY ADVISOR FOR HEALTHY FOOD INITIATIVES HERE, BELIEVES IN EXPANDING HIS GROWING SEASON.

Sam Kass, White House Asst. Chef: We're planting spinach, kale and chard and turnips, as well as a number of other things to keep going throughout the winter. Of course, the first family eats from this garden. In fact at night I cook and we take something out of this garden basically every night. And we are putting up the hoop houses, which obviously keep us able to grow throughout the entire season, and it's something that farmers are doing all over the country.

FARMERS ARE GETTING COST-SHARE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO PUT UP SIMILAR, BUT LARGER STRUCTURES, FROM A PROGRAM OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE. THE PILOT HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL SINCE ITS LAUNCH HERE A YEAR AGO,

Kathleen Merrigan, USDA Deputy Secretary: We've had about 2,500 farmers take up the cost share offer, incredible participation in Wisconsin, Missouri, Minnesota, even as far north as Alaska. So across the board people are enthusiastic.

Patrick O'Leary, USDA: The hoop houses here at the White House garden are smaller than the seasonal high tunnels used on farms, but the concept is the same: a longer growing season and increased environmental benefits.

Merrigan: They can really help with water runoff and water quality, so your nutrients don't flow out; they're certainly very important and helpful in pest management.

Dave White, Chief, USDA-NRCS: And it means a lot, not only to producers and the environment, but to the local community as well. It means that production could actually go year 'round and it means a lot to the hospitals and the places that use this food.

AT THIS FARM IN VIRGINIA - AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY - THE CONCEPT IS CATCHING ON.

Jason Morgan, Utah Farmer: I run a cow-calf business here and this has helped us diversify and there's a good market for the tomatoes and peppers.

Earl Snell, Alabama Farmer: December here in Alabama and we're growing tomatoes and summer squash in our hoop house. This gives us an opportunity to save money on chemicals because it's a controlled environment.

YOU CAN LEARN MORE AT NRCS.USDA.GOV. FOR THE US DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M PAT O'LEARY.